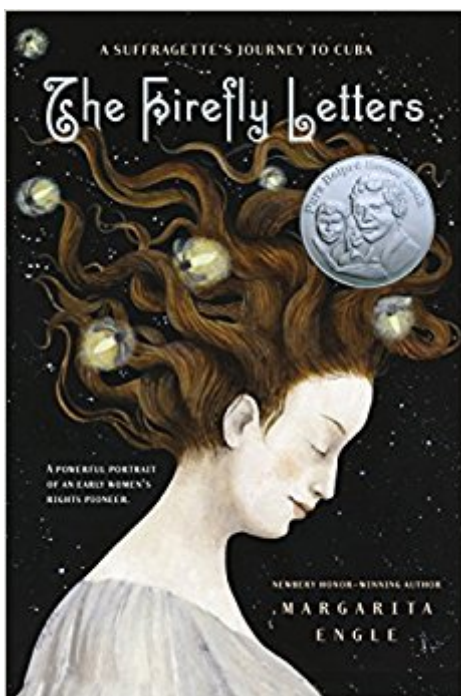


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The Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey To Cuba



Synopsis

A powerful novel in verse about an early women's rights pioneer and the journey to Cuba that transformed her life. When Fredrika Bremer asked the Swedish Consulate to find her a quiet home in the Cuban countryside, she expected a rustic thatched hut, not this luxurious mansion in Matanzas, where Elena, the daughter of the house, can barely step foot outside. The freedom to roam is something that women and girls in Cuba do not have. Yet when Fredrika sets off to learn about the people of this magical island, she is accompanied by Cecilia, a young slave who longs for her lost home in Africa. Soon Elena sneaks out of the house to join them. As the three women explore the lush countryside, they form a bond that breaks the barriers of language and culture. In this quietly powerful new book, which is young adult historical fiction based on a true story, award-winning poet Margarita Engle paints a portrait of early women's rights pioneer Fredrika Bremer and the journey to Cuba that transformed her life.

The Firefly Letters is a story about a little-known early feminist. It's a Pura Belpré Honor Book for Narrative and a Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year, by Margarita Engle, the Newbery Honor winning author of *The Surrender Tree*, *The Poet Slave of Cuba*, *Hurricane Dancers*, *Tropical Secrets*, and many other books. A Pura Belpré Honor Book An American Library Association Notable Children's Book A Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year

Like the firefly light, Engle's poetry is a gossamer thread of subtle beauty weaving together three memorable characters who together find hope and courage. Another fine volume by a master of the novel in verse.

- -Kirkus Reviews, starred review
- This slim, elegant volume opens the door to discussions of slavery, women's rights, and the economic disparity between rich and poor.
- -Publishers Weekly
- Through this moving combination of historical viewpoints, Engle creates dramatic tension among the characters, especially in the story of Elena, who makes a surprising sacrifice.
- -Booklist
- This engaging title documents 50-year-old Swedish suffragette and novelist Fredrika Bremer's three-month travels around Cuba in 1851. . . . The easily digestible, poetic narrative makes this a perfect choice for reluctant readers, students of the women's movement, those interested in Cuba, and teens with biography assignments.
- School Library Journal
- The author has a gift for imbuing seemingly effortless text with powerful emotions. . . . This uncommon story will resonate.
- The Bulletin
- The imagistic, multiple first-person narrative works handily in revealing Bremer, an alert and intelligent woman in rebellion against her background of privilege.
- The Horn Book

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Customer Reviews

As in *The Poet Slave of Cuba* (2006) and *The Surrender Tree* (2008), Engle draws on little-known Cuban history to tell a stirring, immediate story in poetry. Based on the diaries and letters of Swedish suffragist Fredrika Bremer, who spent three months in Cuba in 1851, this title focuses on oppressed women, the privileged as well as the enslaved, in three alternating free-verse narratives. Fredrika remembers that back home in Sweden, she was kept hungry so that she would grow up to be thin and graceful. Her savvy translator is Cecilia, a teenage slave who remembers being captured in the Congo when she was eight years old and sold to a trader by her own father. Elena is a fictional character, a privileged girl in a slave-owning family who is forced into a life filled with œfrilly dresses and ornate dance steps• that allows her little freedom. Through this moving combination of historical viewpoints, Engle creates dramatic tension among the characters, especially in the story of Elena, who makes a surprising sacrifice. Grades 6-12. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Although it is written in a prose format, this book immediately draws the reader into its plot. As a matter of fact, the prose format is an advantage because it cuts out all of the unnecessary "fluff" and leaves just the "meat" of the story for the reader to enjoy. After 45 minutes of dedicated reading, I was disappointed to see this book end, and I highly recommend it! Definitely a must-read!

Got this book for our 9year old daughter, who loved reading it. She enjoyed the colorful picture the author paints of Cuba, while learning about how girls lived during that time period. Engle does a superb job weaving the thoughts and dreams of the three main characters into a thoughtful story of friendship. Would recommend to anyone!

Arrived in a timely manner and was as described in product description.

Great product, fast shipper

This book, told in verse style, tells the story of Fredrika Bremer, a women's right pioneer. Fredrika travels to Cuba and realizes that slavery and women being controlled run rampant in Cuba. She begins to write about it and this book is based on her journals and letters. This book is told through Fredrika, her translator (who happens to be a slave) Cecilia, and a fictionalized rich girl whose family Fredrika is staying with named Elena. This book was a quick read. It was interesting to read about an area that I am not familiar with and about a person I did not know anything about. I enjoyed it.[...]

In 1851, author and activist Fredrika Bremer spent three months in Cuba, traveling around the island with a young African-born slave who belonged to her hosts and who served as Bremer's translator. Drawing upon the nineteenth century writings and sketches of Fredrika Bremer, an early,

important, and still relatively unknown figure in the women's rights movement, Margarita Engle has crafted *THE FIREFLY LETTERS*, a prose poetry dramatization of Bremer's time on the island. The story is told in alternating poems by Fredrika, her young translator Cecilia, by Cecilia's husband, and by Elena the fictional daughter of Bremer's hosts, a twelve year-old growing up in wealth and privilege who often seems to have even less freedom than the slaves owned by her father. It is when Fredrika leaves the confines of her host's home with Cecilia in tow (leaving young Elena stuck at home without companionship), and sets out across the island, that we come to grasp how the lively and rich culture that the slaves have brought with them contrasts so sharply with the strait-jacketed patriarchal society and customs from which Fredrika has escaped and to which Elena is a young, unwilling victim. *THE FIREFLY LETTERS* is a sterling example of how less can so often be more. Good prose poetry -- like all good poetry -- relies on strategic employment of the right words to paint pictures. As with so many great poetry novels, there is so much payoff here and relatively few words. I had not previously heard of Fredrika Bremer. I had no idea that Sweden and Denmark had enacted that legislation so far in advance of the U.S. I had no idea what Cuba was like 160 years ago. And, yet, in learning so much, I was able to read through this latest work by award-winner Margarita Engle in a very short amount of time, and then return to reread and savor a bunch of the poems I'd marked along the way. I'm not the biggest fan of Women's History Month. (I don't like the idea that one of the twelve months is for women, arguably leaving the other eleven for celebrating the brilliant guys who seem to have always gotten us into these messes.) But, being that it is March, it does make good sense to line up a copy of this book asap.

Before I even get to the book, let me just say, I love this cover. The artist behind it is Ana Juan. *Firefly Letters* is written in free verse. Fredrika Bremer, was an author and she fought for the rights of women. In 1851 Bremer went to Cuba for three months. Engle read, Bremer's letters, diaries, notes and sketches from that visit, *The FireFly Letters* is derived from that. (I got all this lovely information from the historical note in the back of the book) The Swedish consulate places Fredrika with a rich family in Cuba. The family has slaves. Cecilia, a slave (around 15 yrs old), is Bremer's guide and translator. 12 yr old Elena, is the daughter of the house. The story is told through these three women. Engle has given Cecilia's husband Beni, a few poems of his own. I like them, especially the first one. Though I do think Beni's poem messed with the rhythm of the story a little. Cecilia
The huts of the freed slaves make me think of my lost home I remember a ghostly mist rising over the river after a boy drowned trying to escape from the slave traders. The mist was silent but the water sang softly telling its own flowing story. If I had known that my father would trade

me for a stolen cow would have run away into the forest to live in a nest made of dreams and green leaves. Fredrika is against slavery and hates how women are treated in Cuba. Fredrika documented her trip in hopes of making people care about what was going on. With Cecilia as her guide Fredrika sees much of Cuba. At night the two save fireflies, from the children who pull off their wings. Elena watches from her window. It's 1851, and it's not proper for a young girl to do, basically anything. Elena can only do as she is told. She longs for a little independence. Engle's poems are beautiful. The voices of the three women fit together like music. The Firefly Letters was simply a pleasure to read.

A luminous novel in verse. Engle evokes so much emotion, flavor, color and sound with so few words. Also a very interesting story and well drawn characters.

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